

Why Quebec's Foster-to-Adopt Parents Do Not Seem to Consider Contact After Adoption as a Positive

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Contact between adoptive and birth families: What works?

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Outline of presentation

- Dual context:
 - Openness in adoption
 - Exclusivity of filiation or parentage
- Specific issues related to the Mixed-Bank (foster-to-adopt program)
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion



Openness in adoption

- Evidence of the benefits of openness for all parties involved
- Secrecy makes no sense for most children adopted from care
- Openness in terms of family structure vs openness in terms of communication



Exclusivity of filiation or parentage

- Cultural conception of parentage:
 - Legally, each child can only have one set of parents
- Only full adoption exists \Rightarrow severance of the ties of legal filiation with birth family



Specific issues related to the Mixed-Bank (MB)

- Fostering of a child deemed at high risk of abandonment
- MB parents take on the "risk" of the child never becoming adoptable
- Legal status = foster parent (no rights)
- Birth parent, despite lack of competence, is still sole holder of parental authority



Research question

To better understand how MB parents develop the sense of being the parent of the child they foster while they are neither the biological nor the legal parent?

In this context, it seemed highly relevant to look at how MB parents position themselves in relation to the birth parents.



Methodology

- Grounded theory methodology
- Semi-structured interviews (2,2 hrs on average)
- 25 MB parents
 - Average age: 40
 - 72% female
 - 68% heterosexual
 - 60% infertile
- 20 children
 - Average age on arrival in the MB family: 19,5 months
 - Average age at time of interview: 40,8 months
 - 55% boys
 - 40% lived with birth parents
 - 65% had contact with birth parents prior to adoption



Results

- Most MB parents have a profound desire to have a child of their own
- Looking for entitlement to justify adoption
 - Only one to take care of child on daily basis
 - Looking for a privileged relationship with child
 - Want the child to recognize them as parent


Looking for a privileged relationship with the child

[...] no one had been able to calm him down, to approach him. I was the only one who could touch him. [...] He had been in our home for only six or seven months. And he was able to calm down in my arms. [...] Sometimes, he talks to me about it. So in that moment, something happened. Really, not like confidence, but a feeling: listen, I can do it. I was convinced: give him to me, I can calm him down. Like a mother's gut feeling: give me my baby.

Jacinthe



Want the child to recognize them as parent

A black silhouette of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, facing right. She is positioned to the left of the speech bubble.

The moment when I felt the most like her mom? Well, she decides. [...] At first, when she'd get hurt, she'd yell out "mommy!", but I knew it was mommy Lucy [her birth mom]. Just by the tone of her voice... the way she'd say it... I knew it was the other mom. So you know, you comfort her, but you know she belongs to the other mom. And then more and more, she came to me...


Catherine



Results (2)

- According to MB parents' narratives, child protection and adoption workers try to minimize:
 - Anxiety linked to the "risk" of losing the child
 - Guilt linked to the idea of taking someone else's child
- This pushes MB parents to try to evacuate birth parents from their lives

Anxiety linked to the "risk" of losing the child

A black silhouette of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, facing right. She is positioned to the left of a large blue speech bubble.

[...] social workers recommended we shouldn't arrange for the kids to meet. They say we shouldn't create a bond that doesn't exist. If it was meant to be, then one day, they'll meet, but we shouldn't make up a whole other family. We shouldn't confuse the kids. There are things kids can't understand at such a young age.

Jocelyne

Guilt linked to the idea of taking someone else's child

Of course I would prefer to adopt him, but on the other hand, we think it wouldn't be fair for a judge to cut the parents off for good, because these parents love Toby so much. Poor them, I think it's a shame that, because you're intellectually disabled, it's not your fault you know, but your child is still removed from your care because you're disabled. When your child is removed because you lack motivation, because you can't even make an effort, then you don't deserve to keep your child. But to have your child removed because you're disabled... These people already don't have much in life, and society takes away what they have that's most precious.

Alice




MB parents try to evacuate birth parents from their lives

Because apparently, the birth mom is crazy and she's really invasive. Social workers hate her. Both social workers [...] they hate her like you wouldn't imagine. She must really be something.

Fabienne



MB parents try to evacuate birth parents from their lives

A black silhouette of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, facing right. She is positioned to the left of a large blue speech bubble.

[...] just because the birth mother still sees her older son every week under supervision doesn't make her a mother. That makes her someone who cares, I'll give her that. She can love her kids. I'll give her that. But she's no good for her kids. She can't give them what they need to grow healthy, to be happy and to not be torn.

Renée

MB parents try to evacuate birth parents from their lives

It's funny because I was thinking about your first question: Describe your family. [...] some people might say that should include my son's father and mother, but not according to me. [...]

To me, my family is my husband, my son, my parents, my in-laws, my brothers, my sister, you know, it's all very conventional. But Étienne will have the choice to say that his family can include his father and I think it would be totally normal. Just like I'd think it would be normal if he decided his father is not a part of his family.

It'll depend on his own path.

Natacha






Results (3)

- MB parents show some level of openness
 - Exclusively to help the child create a positive adoptive identity
- Limits of openness: birth parents can be symbolically present but not physically present

Limits of openness

A black silhouette of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, looking towards the right. She is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the blue speech bubble.

A friend was telling me: I'd love to adopt a child through the Mixed-Bank! So I asked her: Can you accept the presence of the birth parents in your life? Her reaction was: What? I told her, I'm not saying you have to invite them over for dinner, but can you accept having the birth mother's picture up on your living room wall for instance? Just like you'd put up pictures of your goddaughter? Her reaction was: Are you crazy? Well, think about it, I told her, because his birth mother is a part of him.

Jacinthe



Discussion

- Quebec's legislation is about to change to introduce open adoption

How can we encourage MB parents to be more open after the adoption when they are encouraged to exclude birth parents before the adoption?